

CHURCH NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

Edited by
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Northern Comments on Action by the Pope.

The step taken by Pope John XXIII to convene an Ecumenical Council has caused considerable attention and has been widely commented on in the Northern countries. These comments, however, are all qualified by the fact that the purpose of such a Council is not clear and that the extent to which other denominations might be invited to take part in the Council is not yet known.

Bishop H. Fuglsang-Damgaard, Copenhagen, states:

"So often - and rightly - we have expressed regret that the Roman Catholic Church does not take part in the ecumenical cooperation that we cannot but feel joy at the spreading of the ecumenical idea. For this reason I consider the action of Pope John XXIII a step forward. During his short papacy he has shown a democratic and popular understanding and this fact further supports the hope that real debates are contemplated and not just a dictate from Rome. The initiative of the Pope opens up new perspectives and may become an important step on the road towards the unity of the church."

The "Kristeligt Dagblad", Copenhagen, describes the action of the Pope as an epoch-making step, meriting attention and eager anticipation, but is rather doubtful as to whether Rome will be able to yield an inch with regard to the infallibility of the Pope and to the Pope's being a successor to St. Peter and the 'Deputy' of Christ.

The Primate of the Norwegian Lutheran National Church, Bishop Johs. Smemo, Oslo, says:

"Certainly we must appreciate this step although it still remains to be seen what it may lead to. We all know the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope. In advance it seems inconceivable either that the Orthodox Church will acknowledge this dogma or that the Roman Church will abandon it. Consequently, I am rather doubtful about a successful outcome. The Evangelical Church will never acknowledge any other highest authority than Holy Script."

The Christian daily paper in Oslo "Vårt Land" feels that the step taken by the Pope must be regarded, among other things, in relation to the importance of the ecumenical movement in our time, but considers the possibility of a reunion between Roman and Ortho-

dox Catholicism to be very slight. The distance between them is too great. As for the Protestants we all know that the Roman Catholics regard them as heretics who are denied the right to propagate their faith in countries with a Roman Catholic majority, and a Council on a par with heretics must be an impossible thought to a Roman Catholic.

Bishop Bo Giertz, Gothenburg, describes the decision by the Pope as a milestone in church history. He continues:

"It is particularly interesting that, to all appearances, Pope John XXIII is going to re-introduce the old democratic procedure according to which participants in the Council may vote about the problems dealt with without restrictions and decide on matters by ballot. If Rome should consent to ecumenical cooperation it would mean new possibilities, but it is still too early to predict what such an Ecumenical Council might amount to."

DENMARK

The International Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

As in previous years the International Week of Prayer for Christian Unity from January 18th - 25th was marked in Copenhagen by an "Ecumenical Church Stroll" arranged by the St. Alban and Sergei Society. App. 1 000 people took part in the interesting tour which began in a Methodist church and went on to an Orthodox, a Roman Catholic, an Anglican and a Lutheran church. In each place the members in the tour attended short devotions in accordance with the practice of the denomination concerned, and everywhere the prayer for the Christian Unity occupied a prominent place. The evening closed with a joint meeting at which ministers from the Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Roman Catholic churches spoke on a common subject, "Creation and Providence".

On the last evening of the Week of Prayer a special meeting took place in Copenhagen. The festive meeting was also well attended, and here Professor N.H. Sjø spoke on "The Responsibility of the Church in an Atom Age", and Rev. Poul-Erik Bjerno from the Methodist Church talked about the meeting at Nyborg Strand of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

Only Slight Interest for a European Christian Broadcasting Station.

The collection of signatures to a recommendation for the establishment of a special Christian broadcasting station in Europe did not meet with any great success. In "Kristeligt Dagblad" the President of the Evangelical Alliance, which was in charge of the collection of signatures together with the Christian Listeners' Association, says that only 5 000 signatures were obtained in Denmark. In his opinion the small number is due to, on one side, a certain fear of the "American" and foreign aspect of the matter and, on the other, to the fact that there have been fewer revivalist movements in Denmark than in the other Northern countries where the number of signatures is considerably larger. The Norwegian Evangelical Alliance has collected 45 000 signatures and in Sweden the number is 20 000.

It is planned to set up the broadcasting station in a not yet specified place in Europe in charge of the same corporation which runs the well-known broadcasting station "The Voice of Andes".

Retreat Home for Women Being Built by Former Medical Missionary.

At present a former medical missionary in India, Miss Anna Bramsen, is putting up a retreat home for women in a desolate spot in the heath North of Skjern in Jutland. The retreat home, which is expected to be ready by May 1st, will be able to accommodate 10 women besides three permanent inhabitants who are to be in charge of the work. It will provide an opportunity for busy people for a few days or weeks to find peace and quiet in prayer.

The retreat home is being built quite near to the church which a work camp run by the World Council of Churches helped to erect last summer. A similar camp will continue the work this summer from July 3rd - August 2nd.

The plan is to conduct the services in this church according to the order employed by the Danish Lutheran Church immediately after the Reformation.

Missionaries for Life or for a Number of Years?

The present practice that missionaries, as a matter of principle, are engaged for life for work on the mission field now seems to be about to be taken up for revision so that missionaries may be engaged for service for a limited number of years.

At the annual meeting for foreign mission of the Danish Christian Student Movement in Roskilde the Professor Torben Christensen raised the question of such a change as he felt that the missionary societies might otherwise be deprived of much valuable labour. Many able men and women hesitate at severing all connection with their home country and, consequently, do not offer their services for a missionary enterprise.

Strong protests against such a view of the missionary calling were heard from several quarters. "A slave cannot bargain with his master as to the length of service", it was maintained, among other things, and the opposition to a shorter term of service for missionaries was also motivated by the lengthy training and the time spent in becoming accustomed to conditions on the spot, both of which are necessary for a contribution of any value.

In the course of discussion representatives of a number of missionary societies declared that they do not demand lifelong service of their applicants, but are ready to receive applications from people who are willing to go out as missionaries for a shorter term of service.

FINLAND

Diocese of Helsinki (Helsingfors) to be Established on July 1st.

On July 1st the Finnish Lutheran National Church will include an eighth diocese, viz. the long since wished for Diocese of Helsinki (Helsingfors) which will be established from that date. This decision was taken by Parliament in connection with the reading of the Budget on which 2 million Finnish marks were appropriated towards the establishment of the necessary offices and positions and other things in the new diocese. The election of the new bishop will take place in the spring.

Already in 1948 the Church Assembly advocated the establishment of a Diocese of Helsinki (Helsingfors) as the Diocese of Tampere (Tammerfors), to which the capital belongs, in the course of time had grown to include more than one million inhabitants. Helsinki (Helsingfors) alone numbers some 450 000 people.

The Swedish speaking parishes in Helsinki (Helsingfors) will remain in the Swedish Diocese of Borgå (Porvoo).

More than 6 000 Deacony Committees in the Finnish Congregations.

In an interview in the weekly paper "Församlingsbladet" the Secretary for Social Affairs, Rev. Pentti I. Hissa, says that in the congregations of the Finnish dioceses alone there are to-day about 6 000 deacony committees at work, and added to this come similar committees in the Swedish diocese. Since the War determined efforts have been made to establish both town and district committees of 3-4 people each who are to be responsible for the best possible running of charity work in the congregations. The Ministers for Social Affairs in the different dioceses keep in touch with the individual committees and arrange courses for their members at which the biblical foundation of deacony service and its practical applications are studied.

14 000 people all over the country are actively engaged in the large-scale collection for church charities and 2 000 sewing circles are also helping to raise funds for the deacony activities. As a new feature in this connection the Secretary for Social Affairs mentions the growing cooperation between relief of the church and of the society.

Resolution From the Finnish Kirchentag at Jyväskylä.

The Finnish Kirchentag under the motto "The Gospel in the World of Contrasts" at Jyväskylä last month were attended by 800 people. A resolution from the meeting was published in which appeals are made for a united effort in the difficult political situation. Among other things, it says:

"Our hearts are heavy with the present difficulties of our people. To our mind they are due mainly to mutual controversies and differences of opinion. History shows that this nation has overcome many great difficulties as long as it stood united. We must find the way towards harmony. We are sincerely convinced that the gospel, the dearest treasure of the church, is a power from God, able to break down the barriers between people and to settle the conflicts in the life of the nation".

The Finnish Missionary Society Extends its Activities.

The Finnish Missionary Society which celebrated its centenary last month, has decided to extend its activities on important fields. Thus, a new mission among the Bushmen in Amboland (South Africa) will be started. On Formosa a new work centre is to be opened, and in Pakistan the Missionary Society will take up something quite new to it, viz. evangelization among Mohammedans. In Jerusalem a boarding school is to be erected, and in Tanganyika a policlinic will be opened.

In the course of the hundred years the Society has employed more than 400 missionaries in its service, 300 of these in Africa, and 92 in the Far East. In 1958 there were 112 missionaries, 100 of whom worked in Africa, 5 in the Far East and 7 in Israel. Last year the budget amounted to app. 200 million Finnish marks.

The centenary celebrations were a big and inspiring event in the life of the Finnish Church. The main celebrations in the ceremonial hall of the University of Helsinki (Helsingfors) were attended by the President of the Republik, President Urho Kekkonen.

The National Character of the Work of the Church Among Young People.

Recently the Central Committee for Church Activities among Young People in Finland conducted a conference at Järvenpää (Traskända) for youth leaders at which 250 leaders discussed the national character of the work of the Church among young people. The idea for the conference came from the Army Bishop Right Rev. Toivo Laitinen, who in his opening address on "Our Native Country - a Gift From God" emphasized that the Finnish nation needs a firm faith in the God of history. He stressed the responsibility of youth leaders in contributing towards making such a solid faith a living factor in the nation. If this does not happen, idols will take its place.

Bishop Eero Lehtinen closed the meeting, and, among other things, said:

"It is not enough to travel around and collect scattered memories in order to find a goal in life. Our goal must be to fit our small lives into the great context, our daily work into the service of our country. Every honest piece of work, every calling is ennobled by being brought face to face with our native country."

New Growth in Women's Work in the Church.

At a meeting last month in Helsinki (Helsingfors) 100 women from a number of congregations met in order to discuss women's work in the church. The meeting was arranged by the Women's Committee of the Lutheran National Church and for the first time the Committee approached the individual congregations personally and requested them to choose themselves their representatives at the meeting.

Here it was strongly emphasized that also in the work among women the Church must learn to speak the language of modern people and that yesterday and the methods of yesterday must be a thing of the past. Christianity always means a new life.

Donations for Missions to be Exempted from Taxation?

Inspired by the motion brought in by 30 Swedish M.P.s for exemption from taxation of donations for humanitarian, religious, and similar purposes (see page-10 in this number) the Finland-Swedish weekly "Församlingsbladet" suggests a similar exemption from taxation in Finland also. Reference is made to a provision saying that donations exceeding 100 000 Finnish marks towards the furthering of science and physical culture are exempt from taxation and it is suggested that this provision be extended to include all donations towards missions and international relief work.

Finnish Comments on Firing of Moon Rocket.

In a leader the Finland-Swedish Christian weekly "Församlingsbladet" reflects on the firing of the Soviet Russian lunar rocket "Lunik". The paper expresses sincere appreciation of the scientific efforts behind the event, although it is tempered by a certain anxiety with regard to the greater perspectives opened up by it.

Both the worship as well as distrust of technology are equally emotional attitudes, the paper writes. Technology is neither divine nor devilish. It is simply a part of the task of man to "subdue the earth", although the military and political consequences of the rocket places a special responsibility on the shoulders of man.

As an example of an attitude which may cause justified misgivings the paper cites the following extract from a commentary by the Finnish Communist paper "Kansan Uutiset" in which it says:

"The short history of the development of man, which, by the way, has been suppressed by various mystical conceptions found within large sections of humanity, has tied man to the earth, but modern science of to-day, having embarked upon the conquest of space, shows that also in this respect divinity lies in the hands of man himself, in his brains and in his hands."

"The results of technology, the 'Församlingsbladet' writes, become truly alarming when they are used for the self-worship of man in clear violence of the express words of the first commandment 'Thou shalt have no other Gods for Me'. At that point the things created, and particularly the things created by man himself, take on a devilish character. Not in the respect that demonism lies in the things as such, but man makes them so and imbues them with his boundless hubris."

The article concludes by saying:

"If man exalts himself to be God, then there is reason for the nations to tremble, not in the face of technology, but for the titanic visionary which no longer is able to look objectively upon himself and the results of his efforts. In the leader the "Kansan Uutiset" shows no kinship with the technical and scientific objectiveness lying behind the "Lunik" but a considerable greater likeness with the propagandist of the Revelation which opens its mouth for blasphemous speech."

ICELAND

Episcopal Election on Iceland to be Held in March.

Last autumn the Bishop of Iceland, Bishop 'Asmundur Gudmundsson, was 70 years old and thus reached the retiring age. At that time an amendment to the Act about episcopal election was proposed in Parliament allowing the present Bishop to remain in office until the age of 75. The amendment was met with considerable opposition in Parliament, however, and in the end it was rejected. Now the episcopal election has been fixed for March and the result will probably be known by April 1st.

NORWAY

133 More Missionaries Than Ten Years Ago.

In an interview with the Christian daily paper in Oslo "Vårt Land", Rev. Tormod Vågen, President of the Norwegian Missionary Council, says that to-day there are 133 more missionaries employed by the Norwegian missionary societies than 10 years ago. A few missionary societies have had fewer new missionaries than they needed, while others have had ample recruitment.

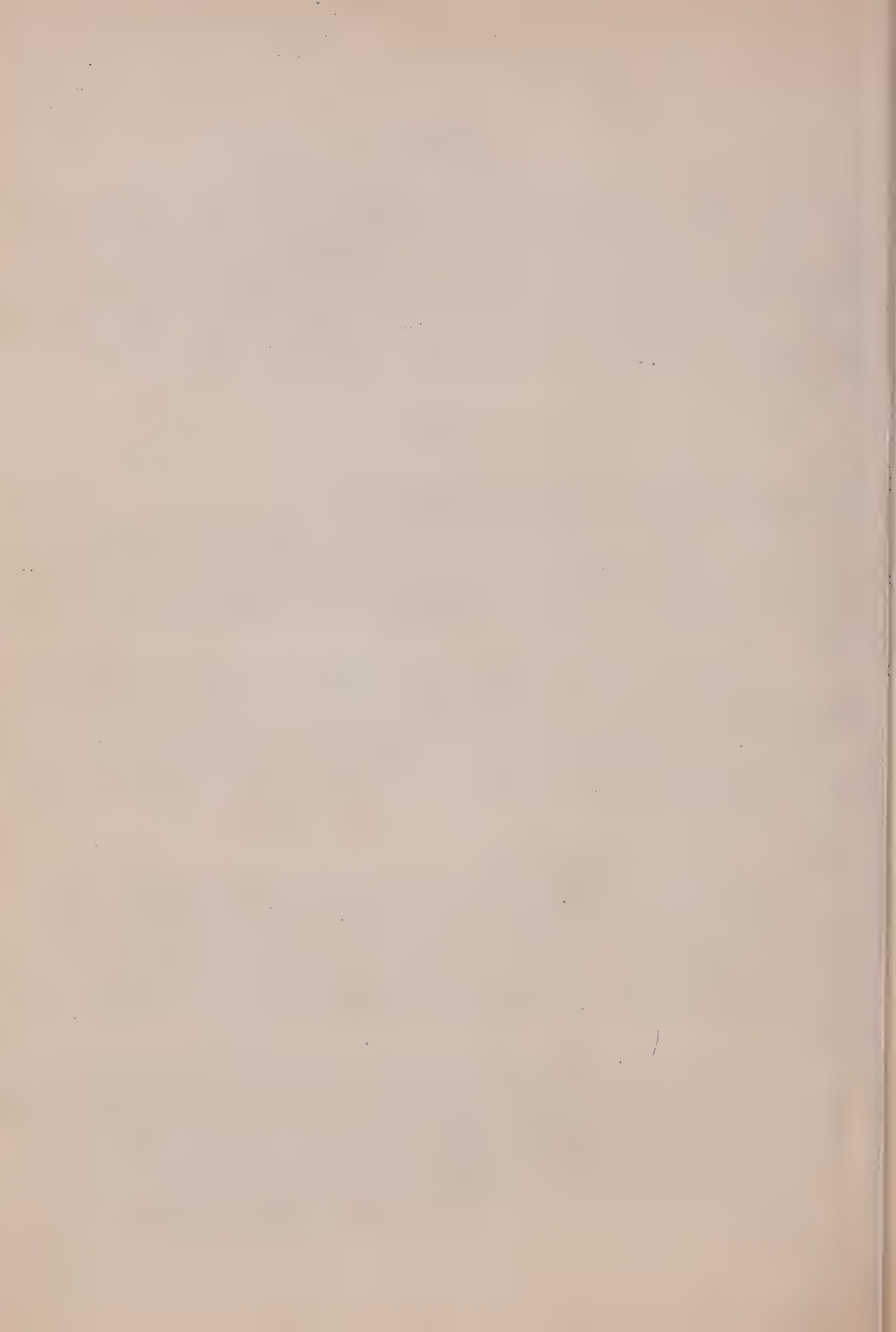
The President especially emphasized that the training of future native leaders, Christian literature, and broadcasting enterprises are spheres calling for special efforts on the mission field in the years to come. Many of the coloured people are extremely keen on reading and, consequently, he feels that the missionary societies ought to multiply their literary activities, educate interpreters among the natives themselves and supply them with all the best of the literature of the West.

Increase in Church Attendance.

It has been reported lately from several dioceses that church attendance is on the increase. This is the case, for instance, in the Diocese of Tunsberg where Bishop Bjarne Skard in an interview with the "Drammens Tidende" says that the number of church-goers has increased during the past year. The Bishop feels that people to a much greater extent than before have realized that they cannot "live on nothing" but must have something on which they may both live and die.

Bishop Arne Fjellbu also reports increased church attendance in most places in the Diocese of Nidaros. He draws special attention to the fact that the younger generation is definitely better represented than before both as regards church attendance as well as going to communion. He estimates that almost half of the communicants at the Cathedral are young people. In one church in the Diocese the number of church-goers had more than doubled from 1955 to 1958.

Bergen also reports some increase in church attendance.



Suggestion for Merging of the Lutheran and the Methodist Churches.

In an article in the publication of the Home Mission in Oslo "Vår Kirke", Mr. Jacob B. Natvig, Managing Director, suggests that negotiations should be taken up between the Lutheran and the Methodist churches with the purpose of a union. In the article, which is inspired by the discussions on a union of denominations in England and Scotland, it is pointed out that the two denominations are largely agreed about doctrines, and with regard to church organization the two church systems might be modified as time went on.

In suggesting negotiations between the two denominations mentioned above, Mr. Natvig feels that a beginning should be made between those which are most closely related to one another.

20 More "Hard Core" Refugees to Norway.

The Norwegian Ministry of Social Affairs has sanctioned a plan drawn up by the Norwegian Refugee Council according to which 20 so-called "hard Core" refugees from camps in Austria are given a new home in Norway. The group is expected to number about 35 people, including relatives. The Norwegian Government has granted 500 000 Norwegian crowns towards the plan and the Refugee Council will cover the remainder of the cost, amounting to 200 000 - 300 000 Norwegian crowns.

During the first year the refugees who are all invalids or people who in other ways are much handicapped, will be accommodated in a big former convalescent home which has been rented by the Inter-Church Aid Organization that will also run it. The present leader of the Scandinavian Home for Hungarian refugees in Vienna, the deaconess Rakel Grytås, will be in charge of the home.

The plan is to place the refugees in various Norwegian social institutions when they have been given some instruction in the language and become acquainted with Norwegian conditions.

In January 10 Hungarian refugee students arrived in Norway and another 10 who have been invited to study at higher educational institutions by the Norwegian National Union of Students will arrive shortly. The total number of Hungarian refugee students in Norway will then be 140.

No Social Indications in New Abortion Bill.

In January the Norwegian Government introduced a new Bill about induced abortion and according to the Bill there will not be access to induced abortion on social indications as was suggested by the Penal Code Commission in 1956. The Government has left out the much disputed and, by church quarters, strongly opposed section in the proposal of the Commission which gave access to induced abortion "when serious and prolonged illness on the part of either husband or wife, or alcoholism, criminality, housing shortage, or other particularly unfortunate circumstances might turn the birth of a child into a calamity. When evaluating this, account should be taken of the physical or mental weakness of the woman."

On the other hand, Government has extended the section about medical indications to include consideration of "the living conditions of the woman and other circumstances which might lead to illness or weaken the physical or psychical state of health of the woman" when deliberating as to whether the life and health of the woman is in serious danger.

According to the proposal the decision about a possible induced abortion should be taken by two physicians, one of whom must be the medical superintendent of the hospital where the operation is to take place.

News in Brief.

- This year Easter Week church celebrations will also be arranged in Oslo. These will include, among other things, an exhibition of religious book-craft, sight-seeing tours of interest from a church-historical point of view, religious films, musical devotions, concerts, as well as a number of meetings and church services.
- A report published recently shows that from July 1st, 1957, to June 30th, 1958, there were 441 religious broadcasts in the Norwegian State Broadcasting Service, including 64 church services, 302 morning prayers, 22 meetings, 6 discussions, 32 features and commentaries, 14 lectures and 1 musical programme.
- In a leader the Christian daily paper in Oslo "Vårt Land" suggests that donations towards missions and humanitarian relief work should be exempted from taxation.
- Dr. Fridtjov Birkeli, General Secretary, has been elected President of the Joint Council of the Voluntary Christian Organizations. Rector Carl Fr. Wisløff was elected Vice President.
- The editing of Bishop Berggrav's well-known periodical "Kirke og Kultur" has been taken over by a son of the Bishop, Øivind Seip Berggrav, Publisher, and Rector Arne Fjelberg.

SWEDEN

No Joint Statement by Bishops on Women Pastors.

The Swedish Bishops' Conference which took place in January did not result in a joint statement or in practical measures with regard to women pastors.

At a press conference following upon the Bishops' Conference Archbishop Gunnar Hultgren said that only one woman has asked to be ordained and her request could not be granted as she did not intend to become a minister in the Swedish Lutheran National Church. Four women divinity graduates, among them Dr. Margit Sahlin who is a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and goes in for women serving as ministers, have declared that as far as they are concerned they will let the matter rest for the time being in order not to cause further dissention in the Swedish church or other difficulties. The Swedish Bishops are agreed to confer with one another in case a woman should approach any of them with a request for ordination.

In England the question of severing the present close connections between the Anglican and the Swedish churches has been raised by a number of clergymen at the Convocations of Canterbury and York. Among other things, it was suggested that no Swedish bishop who has not dissociated himself from women pastors should be allowed to take part in Anglican bishops' consecrations, and that English bishops

should not attend any Swedish bishops' consecrations until it was certain that no woman would be ordained. At York the matter was referred to a committee which is to make a report in May, and at Canterbury it was decided not to discuss the matter until the outcome of a correspondence between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Swedish Archbishop, which began on November 19th, is available. In his letter the Archbishop of Canterbury has pointed out a number of problems arising from the approval by the Swedish Church Assembly of women's access to the ministry of the church and has also expressed the wish that the good relationship between the two churches would be preserved.

At the ordination of the two new bishops, Bishop Nils Bolander and Bishop Ruben Josefson, in January in the Cathedral of Uppsala, no bishop from the Anglican Church had been invited by the Swedish Church to attend the ceremony, as is usually the case. This was doubtless due to a wish to avoid making an issue of a difficult question.

In a statement to the Swedish "Dagens Nyheter" the Foreign Secretary of the Anglican Church, Canon Herbert Waddams, declared that to his mind no friction need arise in the present relations, neither on the personal nor on the official level. He, personally, does not believe that there will be any change, not even on the day when the first Swedish woman is ordained.

Exemption from Taxation of Donations Towards Religious and Humanitarian Purposes.

30 Swedish Members of Parliament have brought in a motion that the possibility for exempting from taxation donations for humanitarian, religious, literary, scientific, and educational purposes should be closely investigated. According to the proposal exemption should be granted for donations up to 10% of the taxable income and not exceeding 1 000 Swedish crowns.

Similar motions have previously been turned down by the Swedish Parliament.

Swedish Ecumenical Women's Council Set Up.

At a meeting in Stockholm the "Sveriges Ekumeniska Kvinnoråd" (Ecumenical Women's Council of Sweden) was set up which is to be a forum for the women members of the Christian denominations and organizations. Mrs. Elsa Cedergren was elected President and Dr. Margit Sahlin Vice President.

The Women's Council has taken over the tasks of the Christian Women's Council of Co-ordination and the Women's Committee of the Swedish Missionary Council. The purpose of the Council is to strengthen the unity among Christian women in Sweden and to further ecumenical efforts. The programme of the Council which is compiled of representatives of a large number of Christian organizations, includes contacting conferences and discussions on religious, social and international matters.

Lively Discussion of Aims of Home Ecumenicity.

Home ecumenicity has been lively discussed lately. Thus the "Svenska Dagbladet" has published a number of statements by prominent men from various denominations on their views on church cooperation and the value of church unions.

Bishop John Cullberg, Västerås, feels that a union of the various denominations practicing adult baptism would be natural and that a union between the Lutheran National Church and the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden is desirable.

Like the Bishop the Editor Arvid Svård, Baptist Society, feels that it would be natural for all Baptist sections, the Pentecostal movement included, to unite in one community, while, on the other hand, the Editor E. Sollerman from the Örebro Missionary Association which broke with the Baptist Society in the 1930ies, cannot share in this point of view without further consideration. He feels that organizational fellowship may lead to a weakening of religious unity.

The President of the Mission Covenant Church, Gösta Nicklasson, is happy that home ecumenicity has come into focus and declares that his church is willing to discuss union with other denominations as long as just certain basic biblical truths are maintained.

In a closing article the "Svenska Dagbladet" advocates a closer cooperation between the Baptist communities, a more extensive cooperation between the various Christian denominations, and a mutual discussion conducted in an ecumenical spirit. "When this happens, when good will and Christian generosity becomes evident everywhere, then the essential goal of ecumenicity has been achieved - and then the solution of organizational problems will be of a relatively minor importance", the paper concludes.

